



## WHAT IS THE INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN IN MIGRATION (IMUMI)?

IMUMI is a Mexican NGO that advocates for women migrants and their families within the region of Mexico, the U.S. and Central America. We address issues important to migrant women through legal strategies, research, communication, and policy reform.

Migration laws and policies often impact women in ways that complicate their legal, economic, and care-giver responsibilities. For example, many of the women we represent immigrated to the U.S. initially because they were searching for better educational and economic opportunities for their children. Now they have been deported and are separated from the children they moved to protect, or they have returned to Mexico with their children due to a domestic violence situation in the U.S.

Others have fled violence in Central America to protect their lives and those of their children, only to be detained and deported, either from Mexico or the U.S. Those who have come to Mexico to re-start their lives —either as immigrants from other countries or Mexicans deported from the U.S.— have to face a Mexican bureaucracy that limits their access to education, health, housing, and employment.

IMUMI works closely with networks in the U.S. that focus on migrant rights and deportation defense, but in Mexico deportation and voluntary return are also a reality. One million Mexican families returned to Mexico after the U.S. economic crisis of 2008, and the U.S. has been deporting more than 200,000 Mexicans per year. Currently 11.5 million Mexicans live in the U.S., more than 1 million U.S. citizens live in Mexico, and Mexican immigration to the U.S. is at its lowest in decades. In this context, IMUMI focuses on legal protection during post-deportation as well as policy improvements in Mexico, taking into account the level of integration that already exists in the region and creating solutions that will allow women to make the best decisions for themselves and their families on either side of the border.

# WHAT ISSUES DO WE ADDRESS?

## 1. KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

*When Mónica was 20 years old, she was taken from her baby and trafficked from Mexico to New York where she was forced into prostitution. After four years, she escaped and bravely participated in the criminal case against her trafficker. After receiving a trafficking (T) visa, Monica longed to bring her daughter, Daniela, to New York, but Daniela was being held by the trafficker's family in Mexico. How could Monica find her daughter, re-gain legal custody in Mexico, and bring her to New York? Monica's lawyers contacted IMUMI and for two years, the Mexican family law attorney worked with federal Mexican and U.S. officials to locate Daniela, recover physical and legal custody, and re-unite her with her mother.*

- Women who were detained and deported to Mexico and have lost contact with their children in the process, need help navigating the U.S. family and immigration systems.
- Women who have been trafficked to the U.S. need help reunifying with children they were forced to leave behind in Mexico.
- Women who fled violence and now live in Mexico often wish to bring their children to safety.



## 2. ENSURING ACCESS TO DOCUMENTATION AND PUBLIC BENEFITS

*Guadalupe had lived for eight years as an undocumented domestic worker in Arizona when she was detained during a workplace raid. Since her son, Hector, was at school when she was detained, he ended up in the custody of Child Protective Services. Once in Mexico, Guadalupe contacted IMUMI. Our U.S. and Mexican attorneys worked together to help Guadalupe regain custody of Hector and re-unite with him in Mexico. Once Hector was in Mexico, IMUMI ensured that he could register his Mexican nationality to facilitate access to school, scholarship assistance, and health care.*

- Women and children who have returned to Mexico after living many years in the U.S. need birth certificates and other documentation to access public benefits for their families.
- Central American immigrants and refugees in Mexico need documents to find work and ensure education and health services for their families.



### **3. PREVENTING VIOLENCE AND PROVIDING PROTECTION**

*Marta was forced to leave Honduras after her husband was killed by criminal gangs. She took her 6-month-old son, Sebastian, with her and boarded a bus to Mexico. While traveling through the state of Chiapas, Mexico, Marta was kidnapped and raped. She escaped with a group of migrants and began living in a shelter in Chiapas, but soon discovered that she was pregnant. With a small child and one on the way, she made her way to Mexico City where she contacted IMUMI. Our Mexican immigration attorney helped Marta and her son obtain humanitarian visas as victims of violent crime, register her new baby's birth, and referred her for ongoing emotional support.*

- Women and children fleeing from violence in Central America and from the abuses they have experienced along the way need to be protected through programs that offer alternatives to detention and provide humanitarian immigration status.
- Women migrants who have been victims of violent crime need representation to make a criminal complaint and/or apply for immigration documents in the U.S. or Mexico.

*Graciela immigrated to the U.S. when she was 15. While living in Illinois, she met her U.S. citizen boyfriend, Chris. After a few months of dating, Graciela found out that she was pregnant, and she and Chris decided to get married and start a family together. However, a few months into her pregnancy, Chris began teasing Graciela for "getting fat". When she was seven months pregnant, Chris punched Graciela for the first time and the abuse began to escalate. Chris told Graciela that if she called the police, he would report her to ICE and take their child, so Graciela never told anyone about the abuse. After the baby was born, Chris told Graciela that in order for him to fix her immigration papers, she had to go to Mexico and pick up her visa. Once in Mexico, Chris cut off all communication. IMUMI helped Graciela apply for a special visa under the Violence Against Women Act for undocumented immigrants who have suffered domestic violence, allowing her to return to the U.S. legally to reunite with her son.*

# HOW DO WE WORK?

## 1. LISTEN TO WOMEN MIGRANTS

Through the Legal Clinic's work with over 200 migrant women and their families each year, we learn first-hand how they migrated, what happened to them during the experience, and what their specific needs are in terms of civil, family, and immigration legal support. IMUMI also conducts monitoring missions and exchanges information with organizations in the region to identify the needs of women migrants.



FOTO: Archivo IMUMI, AC.

## 2. FIND OUT HOW COMMON THE PROBLEM IS

Through case representation and broader research, IMUMI identifies recurring issues that require policy or legislative reform.

- IMUMI used statistics and access to information requests to identify the number of foreign-born children living in Mexico, how many were enrolled in Mexico's school system, the barriers to registration, and what states and municipalities were being most impacted.
- IMUMI prepared a report identifying laws and regulations in both the U.S. and Mexico that violate migrants' rights to register the birth or Mexican nationality of their children, or to obtain originals of these documents upon return to Mexico.
- Through case and field research, IMUMI documented the barriers that immigrant women face to obtain work authorization in Mexico and advocated for a new policy to improve access, particularly for immigrant domestic workers.



### 3. IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES FOR POLICY REFORM

IMUMI works closely with other organizations, academics, and government officials in Mexico and the U.S. to advocate for policies that improve migrant women's access to information, public benefits, and due process in legal proceedings. We bring together NGOs and government officials from both Mexico and the U.S. to share information and design solutions to problems affecting transnational families in their communities, creating models that can be replicated in other areas.



FOTO: Archivo IMUMI, AC.

# EXAMPLE OF THE WAY IMUMI WORKS

## Listen

IMUMI represented women who brought their children back to Mexico and reported difficulties enrolling them in school in Mexico because the schools wouldn't accept their children's U.S. birth certificates.

## Research and Communicate

IMUMI documented the cases, conducted statistical research to understand the magnitude of the issue, disseminated information about the problem, and submitted a legal opinion regarding the right to education to the Mexican government.

## Advocate

With a coalition of other organizations, IMUMI requested the formation of an inter-institutional working group on migration policy to address issues of access to education and identity for migrants in Mexico.

## Ensure Policy Reform

Over the course of three years, the working group has eliminated regulatory barriers to ensure that all children in Mexico can register for primary education, regardless of nationality or immigration status. Civil registries can verify U.S. birth certificates electronically through a new bi-lateral agreement, making the registration of dual nationality much easier and less costly.

## Technical Assistance and Monitoring

After policies have been approved, the hard work begins to train organizations and local government officials to carry out the new policies. IMUMI works with women's and migration networks to conduct training, share information, advocate on a local level, and document barriers to implementation in practice to ensure that federal policy reaches the intended beneficiaries: women migrants and their families.

## Results

- The more than 550,000 U.S. citizen children living in Mexico are able to enroll and graduate from elementary through high school regardless of the documentation that they can present. The policy changes have an impact on all children regardless of their nationality or immigration status.
- More than 550,000 U.S. citizen children living in Mexico will have an easier time registering their dual nationality, ensuring their rights in both of their countries. All foreign-born children in Mexico will also be positively impacted by the reforms.

# YOU MAY BE WONDERING:

## 1. WHY DOES IMUMI FOCUS ON WOMEN MIGRANTS?

Women's experiences in the migration process frequently differ substantially from those of men. Women migrants comprise almost 50% of immigrants in the U.S. and Mexico, yet we know much less about their experiences during the journey and their experiences as workers and care givers in destination countries. For example, we began to work on the access to education issue because women who had returned to Mexico not only cared about their children's education—they needed their children to be in school in order to work. Women migrants work in both the public and domestic sectors, so our policies need to promote both their family concerns and their rights as workers.

## 2. WHY DOES IMUMI TALK ABOUT TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN THE U.S., MEXICO, AND CENTRAL AMERICA?

These countries in our region share a particular history of trade, foreign policy, and security concerns, and over a century of migration. Mexican and Central American migration to the U.S. rises and falls in line with economic, political, and demographic changes. Mexican migration to the U.S. is currently low, while Central Americans are living through the most violent period in decades. Families who have migrated over the years live throughout the region in spite of borders. In the U.S. today, 7 million children live in a family with one or more Mexican parent. At IMUMI, we frequently work with families whose members were born in two or three different countries, so we need to have staff that understands the legal and policy frameworks in the region. Our U.S. and Mexican lawyers work together on cases to resolve transnational legal issues.



### **3. HOW IS IMUMI FUNDED?**

Since 2010, IMUMI has been generously funded by private foundations including the Oak Foundation, Global Fund for Women, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Foundations, CAMMINA, AWO, Canadian Fund, and UN Women. IMUMI has also received small grants through Mexican universities and the Mexican offices of development and women's issues. In addition, IMUMI receives hundreds of hours of pro bono contributions each year through the generous support of Appleseed Foundation Mexico, which connects IMUMI with pro bono lawyers in Mexico and provides technical assistance for institutional strengthening.

### **4. WHAT IS THE ANNUAL BUDGET?**

IMUMI's annual budget for 2018 is \$500,000 USD.

### **5. HOW MANY STAFF MEMBERS ARE THERE?**

IMUMI employs 12 full-time staff members, including 2 full-time U.S. lawyers on fellowships and 4–6 project consultants. Volunteers also make an invaluable contribution to IMUMI's work. In 2016, 27 volunteers from Mexico, the U.S., and Europe contributed more than 12,000 hours in the legal clinic and conducting policy research. Volunteers receive basic training on Mexican immigration and family law, U.S. immigration humanitarian visas, regional migration policy, and what it means to work from a gender perspective.

#### **DONATE TO IMUMI**

- From the US, make a tax deductible donation through our fiscal sponsor at <https://goo.gl/RijSEz>
- From Mexico, make a tax deductible donation by contacting [fortalecimientoimumi@imumi.org](mailto:fortalecimientoimumi@imumi.org)

## IMUMI IN THE NEWS

«Trump's threat of mass deportation fills Mexican migrant towns with fear», *The Globe and Mail*, Feb 22, 2017,  
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«US-born students in Mexico risk becoming 'lost generation'»,  
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*NACLA*, Jan 7, 2016, <https://nacla.org/news/2016/01/06/aiding-central-america-women-run>

## PUBLICATIONS IN ENGLISH OR BI-LINGUAL

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*Transnational Families (Familias Transnacionales)*, (2014), <https://goo.gl/upH7N3>

*Access to Education for Bi-national Migrant Children in Mexico (Acceso a la educación de la niñez migrante binacional en México)*, (2015), <https://goo.gl/6UUdo7>

*México Eliminated Barriers to Education for Child and Adolescent Migrants* (*México: eliminan barreras para la educación de la niñez y adolescencia migrante*), <https://goo.gl/JzRW9q>



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